

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRASIL 04112 241252Z

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E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OAS, BR

SUBJECT: ELECTION OF ORFILA SEEN AS DEFEAT FOR BRAZIL

1. SUMMARY: BLAMING THE U.S. AND ARGENTINA FOR BREAKING A "GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT" IS NOT TO ELECT REPRESENTATIVES OF MAJOR MEMBER NATIONS TO THE SECRETARY-GENERALSHIP OF THE OAS, MOST EARLY MEDIA COMMENTARY SAW THE ORFILA ELECTION AS A DEFEAT FOR BRAZIL AND A STRATEGIC VICTORY FOR THE U.S. SOME COOLER HEADS, HOWEVER, HAVE NOTED THAT ORFILA'S POSITION WOULD HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE ON THE OUTCOME OF IMPORTANT ISSUEF BETWEEN BRAZIL AND ARGENTINA, AND HAVE CRITICIZED THE BRAZILIAN OAS GA DELEGATION FOR INEPTNESS IN MAKING A SHOW OF OPPOSING ORFILA'S CANDIDACY.
FOR DEPARTMENT: IS THERE ANY SUBSTANCE TO THE BRAZILIAN CLAIMS OF THE EXISTENCE OF A "GENTLSMAN'S AGREEMENT" IN THIS INSTANCE?
END SUMMARY

2. THE IMMEDIATE REACTION OF MOST BRAZILIAN NEWSPAPERS TO THE ELECTION OF ALEJANDRO ORFILA AS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAS WAS THAT THE ELECTION REPRESENTED A DEFEAT FOR BRAZIL. CLAIMING OFFICIAL SOURCES, THE LIBERAL JORNAL DE BRASILIA, FOR INSTANCE, SAW ORFILA'S ELECTION AS CREATING "A VERY SPECIFIC PROBLEM FOR BRAZIL," IN THAT ARGENTINE-BRAZILIAN DIFFERENCES WOULD "INEVITABLY" SURFACE "IN AN EXTRA-OFFICIAL FORUM, THE OAS". FOR THE RESPECTED O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO, BRAZILL'S DEFEAT WOULD LEAD TO "A CALM STUDY OF THE SITUATION CREATED BY THE ELECTION", WITH

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRASIL 04112 241252Z

THE LIKELIHOOD THAT BRAZIL'S LOW PROFILE IN THE ORGANIZATION

WOULD BE MAINTAINED, "EVEN TAKING THE FORM OF A REVISION OF BRAZIL'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE ORGANIZATION, ALTHOUGH IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO REACH A DEFINITE CONCLUSION". FOR THE CONSERVATIVE FOLHA DE SAO PAULO, ORFILA'S ELECTION "WAS NOT WELL RECEIVED AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE ARGENTINA COULD TAKE TO THE OAS THE POLITICAL DISPUTES THAT BUENOS AIRES INSISTS ON RAISING AGAINST BRAZIL IN ALL THE INTERNATINAL ORGANIZATIONS".

3. IF BRAZIL WAS DEFEATED, IT WAS, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, BECAUSE OF THE BREAKING BY ARGENTINA AND THE U.S. OF A "GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT" ON THE PART OF THE MAJOR OAS MEMBER NATIONS NOT TO SEEK THE SECRETARY-GENERALSHIP FOR ONE OF THEIR CITIZENS. THIS VIEW WAS REFLECTED IN A WIDELY REPORTED SPEECH IN THE FEDERAL SENATE BY GOVERNMENT PARTY LEADER JOSE SARNEY, WHO CRITICIZED THE ELECTION FOR BREAKING THE "TRADITION OF EQUILIBRIUM" AND WHO DESCRIBED U.S. SUPPORT FOR ORFILA AS "INCOMPREHENSIBLE". FOR THE CONSERVATIVE CORREIO BRAZILIENSE, THE ELECTION OF ORFILA MEANT THAT "THE U.S. AND ARGENTINA TOOK A POSITION AGAINST BRAZIL... IN BREAKING THE AGREEMENT THAT NONE OF THE GREAT POWERS WOULD PRESENT CANDIDATES FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERALSHIP". THE U.S. HAD A STRATEGIC INTEREST IN SUPPORTING ORFILA, ACCORDING TO THE JORNAL DO BRASILIA, WHICH QUOTES BRAZILIAN DIPLOMATIC SOURCES TO THE EFFECT THAT ORFILA'S ELECTION "REPRESENTS A STRATEGIC VICTORY WHICH COULD BENEFIT THE U.S., BECAUSE THE POSSIBILITY OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFLICT BETWEEN THE OAS AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY HAS BEEN ELIMINATED". IN THIS ATMOSPHERE, BRAZIL'S ACCESSION TO THE ANTARCTIC TREATY ON MAY 16 WAS SEEN BY THE JORNAL DE BRASILIA AS A FIRST RETALIATORY ACT AGAINST ARGENTINA. NOTING THAT THE BRAZILIAN ACTION TOOK PLACE 24 HOURS BEFORE THE FINAL VOTE, BUT WHEN ORFILA'S ELECTION WAS ALREADY ASSURED, THE JORNAL COMMENTED THAT "TECHNICALLY THE BRAZILIAN ACCESSION TO THE TREATY REPRESENTED A FIRST ACT OF REPRISAL, A RATHER STRONG DIPLOMATIC DEMONSTRATION OF DISSATISFACTION WITH ARGENTINA'S CONDUCT AT THE OAS".

4. LATER IN THE WEEK, HOWEVER, COOLER AND MORE REASONED COMMENTARY ON THE ELECTION CAME TO LIGHT. FOR THE CONSERVATIVE SAO PAULO JORNAL DA TARDE, "NOTHING JUSTIFIED BRAZIL'S HAVING ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY THAT ITS OPPOSITION TO ORFILA WAS IN RETALIATION

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRASIL 04112 241252Z

FOR THE DIPLOMACY OF BUENOS AIRES. BRAZIL THUS SUFFERED A QUITE UNNECESSARY DEFEAT THAT IT COULD HAVE AND SHOULD HAVE AVOIDED." NEWSPAPERS ALSO FEATURED THE DENIAL BY VENEZUELAN FONMIN VIGNES OF THE EXISTENCE OF ANY "GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT" AND VIGNES' STATEMENT THAT BRAZIL HAD, IN FACT, SUPPORTED THE ARGENTINE CANDIDATE AT THE TIME OF THE ELECTION OF SECRETARY-GENERAL GALO PLAZA. O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO, IN A MAJOR EDITORIAL MAY 22, DISMISSED THE "GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT" AS OBVIOUSLY OUT-

MODED, AND CRITICIZED THE BRAZILIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR "MIS-CALCULATING" BY SUPPORTING CANDIDATES WHO HAD NO REAL CHANCE OF VICTORY "WITHOUT, APPARENTLY, ANY GREATER REASON THAN THAT OF OPPOSITION(TO ORFILA) . . . THE FACT IS THAT IT WAS NOT BERGES WHO LOST THE ELECTION, BUT BRAZIL WHICH WAS DEFEATED, HAVING AGAINST IT BOTH VENEZUELA AND THEU.S." ACCORDING TO THE ESTADO, THE FOREIGN MINISTER OR HIS ADVISERS ARE AT FAULT "FOR NOT HAVING HAD SUFFICIENT SENSITIVITY TO RECOGNIZE THE MOMENT IN WHICH IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ADVISABLE TO WITHDRAW. WE WOULD NOT THUS HAVE GIVEN THE IMPRESSION THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OPPOSED ORFILA SIMPLY BECAUSE HE IS THE ARGENTINE REPRESENTATIVE."

5. IN COVERSATION WITH THE ECON COUNSELOR MAY 21, SERGIO BATH, A SENIOR ECONOMIC OFFICER OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, WHO, SIGNIFICANTLY, DOES NOT NORMALLY DEAL TIWTH THESE MATTERS, ASKED WHY THE U.S. HAD SUPPORTED ORFILA. BATH WONDERED WHETHER WE HAD CONSULTED OUR LONG-TERM INTERESTS IN THE OAS IN DOING SO, AND REMARKED THAT THE ELECTION OF ORFILA (OR, THE IMPLICATION, ANY ARGENTINE) COULD EASILY PERMANENTLY AFFECT THE ATTITUDES OF MEXICO AND BRAZIL TOWARD THE ORGANIZATION.

6. COMMENT: THE STRONG BRAZILIAN REACTION--AND A GOOD DEAL OF THE PRESS TREATMENT HAS HAD, WE FEEL CONFIDENT, ITAMARATY ORIGINS-- IS THE RESULT OF A COMBINATION OF FACTORS: FEAR AND SUSPICION THAT ORFILA'S ELECTION MIGHT PAVE THE WAY FOR ARGENTINE AGITATION AGAINST BRAZIL IN THE OAS ON THE SUBJECT OF SHARED NATURAL RESOURCES (READ ITAIPU DAM)-- PERHAPS THE SINGLE MOST SENSITIVE SUBJECT IN MBRAZILIAN FOREIGN POLICY AT THE MOMENT: EMBARRASSMENT AT THE OBVIOUS MISCALCULATION ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF THE ORFILA BID: CHAGRIN AT THE PUBLIC EVIDENCE OF FAILURE OF THE WIDELY PUBLICIZED ANTI-ORFILA POSITION: AND AT THE DIRECT AND INESCAPABLE INVOLVEMENT IN THAT FAILURE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER PERSONALLY. WE DO NOT KNOW (SEE OUR QUERIES BELOW) WHETHER THE HEAVY REFERENCES

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BRASIL 04112 241252Z

TO U.S. VIOLATION OF A LONGSTANDING AGREEMENT ARE AN ATTEMPT TO COVER THE FAILURE OR A REFLECTION OF A GENUINE SENSE OF HAVING BEEN BETRAYED. IN ANY EVENT, IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY'S RESPONSE--AND IT IS SILVEIRA'S OWN RESPONSE ESSENTIALLY-- TO ORFILA'S ELECTION HAS REFLECTED A LOSS OF POISE, A LASHING-UT, THAT HAS ONLY MAGNIFIED THE BRAZILIAN "DEFEAT-. SOME OF THE RESPONSE MAY BE EXAGGERATED IN AN EFFORT TO WARN ORFILA AGAINST PARTIALITY, BUT MOST OF THE INITIAL RESPONSE WAS CLEARLY AN EMOTIANAL REACTION TO A PUBLICLY EMBARRASSING SETBACK. FOR DEPARTMENT: IS THERE ANY SUBSTANCE TO BRAZILIAN CLAIMS OF THE EXISTENCE OF A "GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT? DID BRAZIL SUPPORT THE ARGENTINE CANDIDATE IN THE GALO PLAZA ELECTION? WAS THE BRAZILIAN OAS DELEGATION GIVEN ADVANCE NOTIFICATION OF OUR INTENT TO VOTE FOR ORFILA WHEN WE SWITCHEDHFROM BLANK VOTES IN THE FIRST THREE BALLOTINGS? THE ANSWERS WOULD BE USEFUL IN GUIDING OUR

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WHICH APPEARS TO BE
SULLENLY LICKING ITS WOUNDS, SOME OF THEM SELF-INFILCTED, AND
LOOKING AROUND FOR SCAPEGOATS.

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